

WASHINGTON, DC — On Tuesday, February 24, 2009, the House of Representatives passed by a vote of 420 to 0 a resolution “Recognizing the Significance of Black History Month” (H.Res. 83) co-sponsored by Congressman Joe Sestak (PA-07).

The resolution recognizes the significance of Black History Month as an important time to honor the contributions of African-Americans in our nation’s history. It encourages the continued celebration of this month to provide an opportunity for all peoples of the United States to learn more about the past and to better understand the experiences that have shaped the nation. It also affirms that the ethnic and racial diversity of the United States enriches and strengthens the nation.

Congressman Sestak has worked to ensure that people of all races, genders, religions, and orientations are treated with the respect, decency, and equality with which they were created. “I spoke with my father frequently about his service during the difficult periods of World War II, when segregation permeated the armed services’ ranks,” the Congressman said. “We discussed the contradiction that despite the fact that our country sought collectively to destroy the elements of hate and intolerance that plagued Germany, our treatment of our own citizens was far from exemplary. This problematic request, asking citizens to make the same sacrifice without providing the same civil rights, again resurfaced during the time in which I served in Vietnam. It pained me greatly and I have since made civil rights, equality, and respect a cornerstone of my Congressional service.”

The origins of Black History Month date back to the efforts of Dr. Carter G. Woodson, a Harvard-educated scholar and founder of the Journal of Negro History, who in 1926 set aside time in February to recognize the history and achievements of African-Americans. Later, the birthdays of abolitionist Frederick Douglass and President Abraham Lincoln inspired Negro History Week. Black History Month was formally established in 1976.

This month, Congressman Sestak celebrated the 100th Anniversary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) at the fifth annual Black History Month Luncheon and Cultural Celebration hosted by the Greater Norristown NAACP at Westover Country Club in West Norriton. The NAACP was founded on February 12, 1909 – the 100th anniversary of Abraham Lincoln’s birthday. Today, it is the nation’s oldest and largest civil rights organization. The NAACP lobbies Congress daily, works to increase voter registration, and fights discrimination in employment, housing, education, criminal justice, and health care.

In honor of the NAACP's 100th Anniversary, Congressman Sestak entered a citation into the Congressional Record on February 12, 2009, recognizing the many contributions local NAACP branches have made to the 7th District. The citation commended the exceptional work of the Media, Darby Area, Yeadon, Norristown, Mainline, Chester, West Chester, and Philadelphia branches. The Congressman is also proud to announce that he co-sponsored legislation (H.Con.Res. 35) honoring and praising the NAACP on the occasion of its anniversary that passed by a vote of 424 to 0.

*Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, Joe was the first Director of "Deep Blue," the Navy's anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the "Global War on Terrorism." He served as President Clinton's Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from Harvard University. According to the office of the House Historian, Joe is the highest-ranking former military officer ever elected to the U.S. Congress.*

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